



Response to the Giving Green Paper Prepared by Rocket Science, 8 March 2011

1. Background

1.1 The following consultation response focuses on the "Corporate Giving" section of the Giving Green Paper. It looks specifically at the question of how businesses can "scale-up" the support they provide to the communities in which they operate, by increasing the support they offer to smaller community organisations.

1.2 Rocket Science is a niche consultancy which is involved in both the development and evaluation of corporate community investment programmes. We also work with a number of public and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, as well as directly providing capacity-building support to the VCS. This means we have a good understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing both communities, and the businesses who seek to support them.

1.3 The consultation response draws upon discussions at an event facilitated by Rocket Science on 24 February 2011, on the theme of "Corporate Giving in the Big Society: Learning from experience". Attendees included representatives from nine national and international businesses with offices in London, third sector organisations which have received support through corporate community investment programmes, and London Funders, the organisation representing funding organisations across all sectors in the capital.¹ Additional input to this response comes from an online survey sent to businesses following the event, which can be viewed at <http://GivingConsultation.questionpro.com>.

1.4 "Corporate Giving" in the Green Paper refers to both financial donations, and to the provision of employee volunteers and other in-kind support. There was some concern expressed among the organisations we talked to that dealing with both the giving of money and the giving of time in one consultation conflates two sets of challenges which could be dealt with more effectively separately. Nevertheless this consultation response keeps to the terms defined by the Green Paper.

2. Building relationships with small community organisations

2.1 The Green Paper suggests that businesses should be encouraged to provide support to a wider range of organisations than they currently work with, including smaller charities. The main obstacle to achieving this, according to the Green Paper, is that it is "*difficult for businesses and community groups to identify those organisations which share their values*". On the whole, the businesses we consulted agreed that this is an obstacle, however it was suggested that larger businesses are already quite experienced at engaging with suitable organisations.

¹ The businesses represented were Accenture, Betfair, Capita, Deutsche Bank, DLA Piper, G4S, Guardian News & Media, Land Securities and Nationwide.

2.2 There was some appetite for initiatives aimed at brokering relationships between organisations in order to overcome this obstacle. However, it was also emphasised that smaller VCS organisations often need some initial help in getting to a position in which they can engage effectively with potential corporate partners. In this regard, the role of second tier support organisations was seen to be important, and concern was expressed about whether this support layer would be damaged by government spending cuts.

2.3 Smaller organisations often need help in identifying exactly what they need from a corporate funder. This means two things. First, that these organisations need initial support to assess their strengths and weaknesses and form a clear idea of what they are asking from potential funders. This will enable financial and in-kind support from businesses to be targeted effectively, and help build the most appropriate partnerships.

2.4 Secondly, that the support businesses provide to smaller organisations should be a clearly articulated offer, while maintaining an element of flexibility. As a small organisation grows and develops, its support needs will change. For this reason, it is very useful if there is some flexibility in the support provided, for example in terms of access to employee volunteers, expert advice, facilities etc. Organisations without experience of corporate support may be unaware of what businesses can offer them, however. Businesses need to make clear what they can potentially provide to community organisations they have partnered with, rather than assuming this will be obvious, or indeed always required or welcomed.

3. Employee volunteering in small community organisations

3.1 Businesses identified a number of barriers to increasing the number of employee volunteers in small organisations. Chief among these is that small organisations can find it hard to use volunteers: there may not be anyone with time available to manage them, nor any suitable role for them to take up. This is off-putting to businesses, who want to ensure that their employees have a positive experience of volunteering.

3.2 It was noted that even large, established, national charities can find it hard to make full use of employee volunteers, since volunteers may have limited availability, making it difficult to find suitable opportunities for them.

3.3 Another issue is that employees often want to volunteer to do something completely different to their day job, when it is in fact those skills they use in an ordinary working day – financial, legal, or business-planning skills, for example – which are the most useful to small organisations. There is a limit to the extent businesses want to interfere with their employees' volunteering preferences, since they regard volunteering as an individual, "personal", decision. In some respects this mirrors a tension at the heart of the Big Society agenda, if government is perceived to appropriate voluntarism for its own ends.

3.4 There was resistance to the idea of volunteer brokerage to match the volunteers a business can offer with the needs and capabilities of local charities. While businesses were

happy to use intermediary organisations to arrange large volunteering events, there was a feeling that it is better to arrange and manage volunteering opportunities in-house; businesses know their volunteers, and want to make sure that they are engaged and fulfilled in what they are doing.

4. Beyond philanthropy – building relationships with civil society organisations for competitive advantage

4.1 Finally, it is clear from the larger businesses we have consulted that many of them are looking to their corporate community affairs to go beyond giving. There is a growing realisation that, in the increasingly open but competitive market for public services, private companies which demonstrate sustained and mutually beneficial partnerships with community organisations and social enterprise can create opportunities to steal market advantage over their competitors through demonstrating commitment to “shared value”², not just share-holder value.

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² <http://hbr.org/2011/01/the-big-idea-creating-shared-value/ar/1>